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JYW 381: Field of Classics
11/5/24

As the funeral lamps flickered and cast shadows upon the podium and the newly finished mausoleum, Claudius Severaninus Acroates unfurled the scroll wherein was kept the eulogy he had written for his father. On the one hand, the sight of the men - closest friends and associates of his father, Claudius' cousins and uncles - holding in their tears inside their inscrutable faces gave him resolve. The whispering revenant of Seneca himself seemed to instruct them to remain stone-faced and strong. Beside them, sat the Severanine women. The women, by contrast, resembled death more closely than the deceased did. They looked pale and broken, like they hadn't eaten in days. Their hair was disheveled and down, and the circles around their eyes anxiously hissed "*memento mori*".

Unsettled, missing his father, yet also determined to do his memory and legacy justice with the spoken word as his instrument, Claudius closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. As he beheld the faces of his dear ones and those of his mother and father and their friends, he began to speak.

"Friends, family, sons and daughters of Roman Africa, our fatherland," the boy began. "We gather today with heavy hearts, in the solemn solidarity of kinship, for two reasons: to mourn the passing of Gaius Severaninus Rubens into Elysium, but also to celebrate the life he left behind." Claudius glanced behind him at his father's body lying on the slab of marble. An ornate linen covering rested upon his mummy. Macro, the family's faithful slave and a talented sculptor, had made a beautiful plaster covering of Gaius' upper body. Macro had done an exceptional job capturing the shade of reddish-pink on his master's cheeks; so much so, that Claudius began to tear up.

“No, not here! I’m nothing if not a proper man of the Empire.” Trying his best to stay undaunted by the pangs of grief, Claudius continued.

“Both the Immortal Gods and the Roman People, their faithful subjects, found themselves pleasantly surprised by my dearest father. Expectations were low, to the same extent as the prejudices and pretensions of Praetorians are high. Such is the road a child of Leptis Magna must tread if he seeks to make a name for himself, to prove himself to the movers and shakers in Italy. Now, in fairness, it’s not as if he was born to destitution, or worse still, to condemnation to the endless Numidian sands...but, nevertheless, most everything he enjoyed in life, he worked for. Until his last moments, he spoke most highly of the challenges he overcame and the friends he made along the way, many of which I see sitting before me and my family today.”

“Our *Maiores* have always found themselves in a strange position. We have grown up with an ever-growing distance between us and the throne. My father Gaius was a second cousin of Alexander Caesar of the Severan Clan; indeed, he was a second cousin and a second son born in a time and place that preferred not to give him a second thought. He never let that bother him, though. As my grandfather and grandmother will tell you, a young Gaius found himself more focused on things...less becoming of a Roman gentleman growing up.” The crowd chuckled pleasantly, affectionate smiles cracking the stony expressions on the men and lighting up the ghastly ones on the women.

“Dear Gaius cared more about wine, lyric poetry, and - especially so, according to my grandmother - the finest women of Cyrene and the loveliest daughters of soldiers from Timgad than the precarity of the family’s status growing up. We all know well my father’s distinctive blushing face. And not too long after his days as a pleasure-seeking Severanine teenager, the wealthiest traders and merchants of Egypt would soon become quite accustomed to the sight of

his rosy cheeks. What they certainly were not accustomed to from the start was the caliber of competition he would end up posing for them.

As he ate and drank of the wisdom of fertile Egypt, he doggedly learned and mastered the art of trading. Despite the endless hours of *negotium* he killed with the new friends he made, he would quickly surpass the old tycoons. The men who sneered as they rescued him from a sinking barge, courtesy of an especially tricky Memphite she-jackal - a true *discrimen*, I've been told - would soon themselves be the ones caught with their pants down. In a year's time, he had earned a million sesterces trading the finest commodities in Africa. Tyrian purple for red wine from Sicily, papyri from Luxor for the wisest Attican and Corinthian educators, and the know-how of when to give what to whom, earned him his fortune.

When he arrived in Alexandria, the city was poor, and my father poorer. When he left, Alexandria was rich, and the blushing man was richer. Up and down the Nile, as all of us know well, my father gained a hero's fame for his generous patronage and hospitality. During religious festivals, he offered giant sums of his fortune to sponsor poets he liked, playwright friends of his, and every so often, troops of skilled dancers from all around the Mare Internum. I suspect his love for Greek and Lydian dance shows will outlive us all. As I stand here speaking to you all, even still, I can see my father soon to be interred enjoying himself at the games or shows. When I was a child, my father would take me to see the spectacles which he sponsored. The enjoyment of the other patrons - and probably many of the other Plebeians in attendance - would seldom match Gaius'. The way he would toss his diadem made of silver and ivory into the air whenever he was happy. Whether his favorite gladiator slew his opponent, or the coordination and grace of the dancers caused his jaw to drop, or indeed, when the final scene of a Dionysia-winning drama concluded, that damn diadem would go flying into the air. But alas, it rests upon its master's

head one final time, never to soar again. This, friends and family dearest, was the man of whom I speak; whom we will embalm and lay to rest later today.

Father, be assured in your final rest that you left behind the deep, steadfast love of your fellow Severanines, a considerable fortune, a notorious wealth of good memories to which both poor and rich man alike will hark with a smile. Wear the red stripe on your toga in the fields of Elysium with pride. Be carefree in your flaunting of African jewels and pendants and silks, for the Gods will understand a man who treated others so well in life rewarding himself in death. We will certainly toss our (admittedly more fragile) laurels into the air the next time we are moved to a blush thinking about your charms and your magnanimity. Be well, dear Father, and take your final rest now. With love and admiration, your son bids you a final farewell.” Claudius stepped down from the podium. As the rapturous applause and cries of mourning and bittersweet joy filled up the room, he knelt and kissed his father one last time before his burial.